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Extension Service Circular 98

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How to Find and Apply Economic Material as a Background for a Farm and Home Program

Eugene Merritt

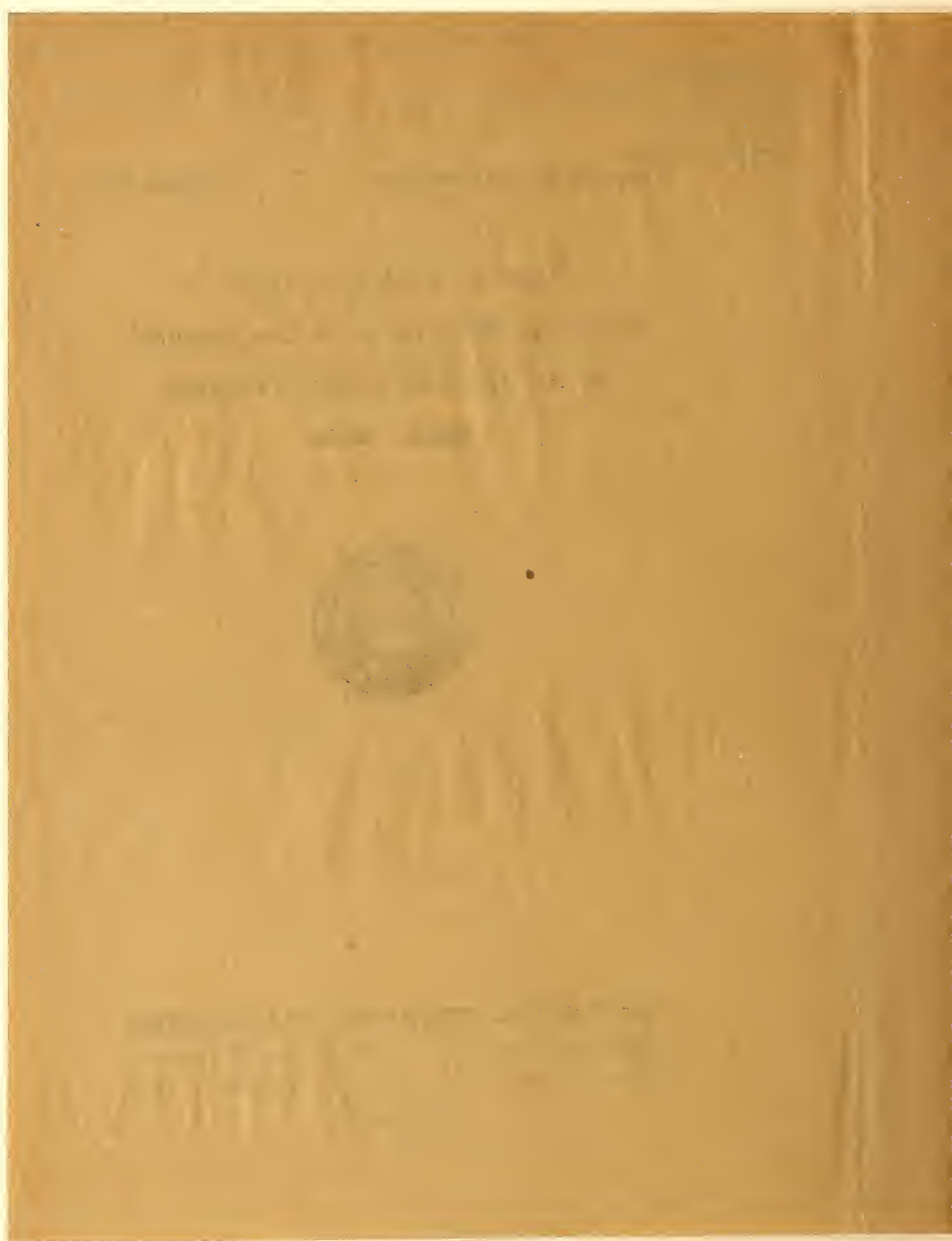


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Extension Service.....C.W. WARBURTON *Director*

Office of Cooperative Extension Work.....C.B. SMITH *Chief*

Washington, D. C.



Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

Extension Service Circular 98

February, 1929

HOW TO FIND AND APPLY ECONOMIC MATERIAL AS A BACKGROUND FOR A FARM AND HOME PROGRAM*

I want to congratulate you upon the concept behind this conference. It is unique in extension history. We have had conferences in the past where groups of extension workers have come together to study the latest in subject-matter. We have had conferences where the extension workers have gone over the extension methods being used in the different States and have worked out more efficient plans for extension procedure. At other times extension workers have been brought together and taught the technique of improved farm and home practices. I understand the purpose of this conference is not to take up any of the above problems but to devise better methods of arriving at the real farm and home problems. Such a procedure results in successful leadership.

So often we assume that leadership is something attached to a personality which inspires other people to follow his guidance; but an analysis of successful leadership will reveal that it is based not so much upon inspiration as upon a diagnosis of the other fellow's problems and of presenting to him a satisfactory solution. The successful director is one who can sense the problems of his State leaders, extension specialists, and county workers, and present a solution to them that will give them increased success and satisfaction in their work. Similarly, the successful State leader is one who can sit down with county workers, go over their difficulties and help them work out a plan that will increase their effectiveness and make them happier in their work. The solution generally presented to the county worker is a method of finding out what are the real problems of his clientele and bring to the farm people a more satisfactory way of farming and homemaking. Therefore, in the selection of your theme for this conference I believe that you are getting at the basic thing behind successful leadership.

In the West we have been attempting to get at these farm and home problems through our plan of "fact organization" or economic conferences. We realize that in the past too many of our extension programs and agricultural and home-making policies have not been based upon facts, and therefore have not helped to solve the real fundamental problem of the farm people. The directors felt that if all the facts with reference to the situation in the different parts of the States and the individual counties could be assembled and analyzed, they would have a much safer and more sound farm and home program. Therefore, I wish first to give a few details as to how this was worked out in two instances in the West.

*A paper read before the North Atlantic Regional Conference, February 26, 1929 by Eugene Merritt, Field Agent, Western States.

DISTRIBUTION: One copy of this circular has been sent to each extension director and to each agricultural college and experiment station library.

Director Bowman of Wyoming decided that he was going to hold an agricultural economic conference on the Shoshone Project. After he had begun to itemize the organization of the agricultural facts, the question came up as to whether the farm home should not also be included in this conference. He called together his home-economics extension staff and instructed them to proceed in the same way that his agricultural staff was proceeding, with an idea of holding an economic conference to consider both the problems of the farm and of the home.

The first thing the home economics staff did was to go over in their own minds what were the problems of the home on the Shoshone Project and try to work out a series of questions which could be handed to local groups of farm women so as to get from them their judgment as to actual farm home conditions in their communities. After this schedule was completed it was taken to the local home demonstration agent, who revised it in view of her knowledge of county conditions. She, in turn called in representative women from the different communities, went over the schedule with them, and asked them to go back, call together their groups, and determine what were typical farm home conditions in their respective communities. After these schedules were filled out they were sent into the home demonstration agent's office, summarized, and analyzed both by the home demonstration agent and the home economics extension specialists.

At the time of the county agricultural economic conference these community leaders again assembled, and brought with them as many additional women as they could interest. They went over this analysis, and out of these facts and their own experience formulated a farm home policy for the Shoshone Project. Many of their recommendations were the same as had been the extension policy in the past, but there was one striking recommendation that came out of their proceedings. In considering their food problems they began to set up in their own minds certain standards as essential for health and happiness. In discussing their clothing problems they not only considered line and color, but how farm families should be dressed in order that they might feel at ease in the social group with which they were accustomed to associate, and how clothing functioned in maintaining the respect of one member of the family for the other. These women also had ambitions for the education of their children. They wanted them to have certain recreational and social opportunities. They considered that they should also have certain religious training and medical attention. Finally the women were asked what, in their judgment, would be a minimum standard for these items and how much in cash this standard would cost. Out of this idea of a minimum standard and its cost came the fact that under conditions on the Shoshone Project it would take about \$1,200 to provide the farm family with these minimum essentials for home making.

On a recent trip West I attended an agricultural economic conference in Cache County, Utah. The conference related primarily to conditions on irrigated farms. Prior to the conference the farm management research man had made a survey of a number of farms. The county agent and State leader visited a large number of farmers to obtain certain enterprise data. For example, in visiting a dairy farmer they would find out from him how many head of cattle he had, what were his average cash receipts per cow, what was his feed bill, his cropping system, and how he fed his livestock. When the farmers were brought together in the county conference they reviewed

all of these facts in view of their own experience and knowledge of the different enterprises. In discussing what would be good systems of farming under irrigated conditions in Cache County they accepted the idea of \$1,200 cash as essential for family expenses.

After reviewing all the facts for a day they came to the conclusion that under Cache County conditions a farmer would have to have 80 acres of irrigated land with above the average yields in order to provide \$1,200 for family living. The principal products for sale from these farms were milk, young stock, sugar beets and wheat. With an 80 acre farm with only average yields there would be available for family living about \$975. But the interesting fact about the situation in the county was that 60 per cent of the farmers had less than 80 acres. There were a number of 40 acre farms and on these farms, with better than average yields and following the general system indicated above, there would be between \$600 and \$800 for family living. When the farmers were asked what their advice would be to a young man on the 40 acre farm, they pointed out that he might secure another 40 acres and have an 80 acre farm, or that he should have the maximum of such intensive crops as sugar beets. They also pointed out that under Cache County conditions the farmer should have one dairy cow for every acre of sugar beets in order to maintain the fertility and secure a profitable sugar beet yield. They recommended that the farmer producing 10 acres of sugar beets keep at least 10 head of milk cows. Another alternative suggested was that a poultry unit be added of from 400 to 600 laying hens.

When the extension staff and the farmers began to analyze further the possibilities for expansion along these lines, they found that the sugar beet factory could consume all the sugar beets likely to be produced and probably would pay about the present price. But sugar beets production could not be profitably increased beyond what the farm family with its own labor could care for.

With reference to dairying, they found that they had a very profitable outlet through their condensary, and that it could take care of additional milk, but that the available feeds in the county were not giving dairy cows the most profitable ration and that there was no room for expansion in acreage. Whatever change was made in dairy feeds would have to come from additional purchase of feed or increase in yields from land already in feed crops. Their recommendations were that the number of dairy cows should not be increased but that their quality should be improved, and that gradually a better system of feeding should be worked out based upon increase in crop yields.

The poultry outlook, however, showed a different picture. There was a very active and successful poultry shipping association in the county which was finding a market for their eggs at a good price, and also providing them at a reasonable rate with whatever feeds they needed to supplement those produced at home. So they looked forward to a poultry expansion as one of the methods of relieving small incomes received from the smaller sized farms.

In these two instances the extension service was attempting to improve its leadership by bringing together the best information relating to the farm and home conditions and submitting it to the judgment of the best

minds in the counties in order to get their judgments as to what would be a satisfactory solution to their problems.

Agriculture and home making are dynamic. Farmers are continually making changes in their cropping and livestock systems and their methods of production. The farm home has to meet new situations due to the introduction of such things as the automobile, electricity, running water and the radio. This analysis of the farm and home problems caused the extension workers to turn back and to review their extension program to see wherein changes would have to be made in order to assist the farmer and his family in meeting the new situations which are continually arising.

The extension service found, for example, that they were helping the farmer in a very successful way to meet the ordinary production problem with reference to the farm; that is, they were helping him to get improved seed stocks, to fertilize his crops, to control diseases and pests, but they had no plan for giving guidance to the trend that the agricultural enterprises should take in the area, and what would make a good system of farming and home making under their conditions. Out of this conference grew this idea - that not only must the extension service give the farmer instructions in the type of poultry houses to build, how to feed his hens, how to control poultry diseases, but he also must be instructed how to build up a unit of from 400 to 600 laying hens. They were helping the farmer improve the quality of his dairy stock and provide the animals with better rations, and were carrying on organized control work for tuberculosis and abortion. The extension people added to this the idea of 10 milk cows on a 40 acre farm, 20 on an 80 farm, and a system of farming to provide them with a profitable ration. They went one step further and suggested that if a 40 acre farm was not bringing the operator at least \$2,500 gross or an 80 acre farm at least \$3,000 gross, the farmer should look into his yields and system of management to see wherein he was failing. They also pointed out that the farmer should keep his expenses at a minimum, and indicated what these figures should be.

A study of the clothing work revealed that the women were being taught how to cut out patterns and how to sew, while the farm women were struggling with the further problems of how to choose their more expensive dresses and what should be the place of clothing their children in their budget and scheme of home making.

In other instances the nutrition specialists was advocating a foods program based upon the assumption that certain vegetables and meats were available from the farm. In certain cases the vegetables advocated could not be grown and in other cases it was far cheaper to purchase canned goods than to employ the labor necessary to raise and preserve.

Not only have these fact organization conferences revealed that agriculture and home making are dynamic but that certain choices and decisions in farming and home making have relatively far different effects upon success or failure.

This idea that the farming and home making are full of choices that have varying significance has an important bearing on our extension program. That is, in Cache County those farmers who chose to operate on 20 to 40 acres made a fundamental mistake, for even if they adapted everything

that was on the extension program so far as improvement of their production process was concerned, they would not be able to maintain this minimum standard of living. Yet the entire effort of the extension service was devoted to helping the farmer improve his productive processes.

In home making also the significance that the father and mother attach to the various elements or influence that go to make up home making has marked effect upon the next generation.

Parents who do not put forth the effort to expand their farm business, sufficiently to meet the minimum requirements mentioned above are sending their children forth with a serious handicap. Parents who were encouraging their children to attempt to make a living on 20 or 40 acres farm under Cache County conditions were starting the next generation off with a large chance for failure. In other cases where farming was unusually profitable there was nothing in the scheme of home economics extension work to help the parents devise the plan for home making which would give the family ultimately the most success and provide the children with the type of training which would enable them when they go out into the world, to be more successful than their parents.

Such mistakes in judgment of the farming people are not only common to the west but to all parts of the country. A recent report showing the income from 1,500 farms in the North Atlantic States indicated that their gross receipts were \$3,200 and their cash outlay, including interest and money spent for improvements, about \$2,400 leaving approximately \$800 cash available for family expenses. Then if we study the distribution of these incomes we find that less than 25 per cent have more than \$2,100 cash available for living expenses. That is, three fourths of the farmers have made the fatal mistakes of attempting to live upon a business too small to furnish them with the minimum standard of living that is the ambition of the usual farm family.

Recently a report from Cornell University on the abandonment of farm land in New York State showed one thing that was interesting along this line. After the farms had once been abandoned someone would come along, go through the process of attempting to farm them, and in turn lose all the money he had accumulated and finally abandon the farm himself.

Farm and home making are in constant state of flux. The different members of the family are continually making these choices or decisions. The successful extension worker is the one who can determine the forces that are shaping the present system of farming and home making, discover the basic problems and help the farming people work out a satisfactory solution.

I feel sure with the great institutional resources at your disposal, and the splendid leadership which you have given your people in the past, that this conference will result in increased success on your part and in your individual states greater happiness on the part of the rural people.



